

Oxley Nature Center

Newsletter

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What Will Come If You Put Out Birdseed? by Amy Morris

The brilliant red Northern Cardinals with their black facial masks and orange bills flutter to the ground like red tissue paper under the bare branches of the redbud tree. There they forage through the dried brown leaves, tossing around bits and pieces of debris as they seek tasty morsels of seeds. The seeds contain life's fuel: calories, protein, amino-acids, and minerals; all the elements required for survival during winter's harsh stay.

The tiny Carolina Chickadees, with their black caps and throat patches, dart quickly to the ground, seize sunflower seeds and return immediately to the limbs of the redbud. There they balance the individual seeds between their toes and the tree branch. With concentrated blows from their tiny sharp bills, they strike through the tough outer shell until the inner treasure is revealed, the nutritious nut meat. A pair of Tufted Titmice rapidly chase one another through the branches. Their heads are topped with gray crests and their sides beneath their wings are washed with a pale and subtle orange. With the chase over, they hammer at their sunflower seeds in much the same way as the chickadees.

An American Goldfinch is feeding on the ground beneath the redbud. This male is already beginning to replace his dull winter coat with bright strokes of yellow along his breast and wings. Small puffs of white down float above the dark wing bands. His dining technique is unique. He takes a whole sunflower seed lengthwise in his bill, cracking and rolling it. He drops the seed to the ground, picks it up again in his bill, and works it around some more. Eventually the seed coat cracks and splinters to give up its prize.

The Dark-eyed Junco is also hopping around beneath the tree, picking here and there with his pale pink bill. His gray and brown upper body sharply contrasts with his stark white breast. He is dining on smaller seeds fallen between the grasses: millet, safflower, and cracked corn. He hops a few steps, dips his head to the ground, lifts and tilts his head as he cracks and swallows his seed, and hops forward again, repeating the process.

The White-throated Sparrows also feed along the ground beneath the tree with their peculiar shuffle and kick gait. These brown sparrows, with their pale yellow eyebrows and white throat patches, kick their feet back in the soil to uncover hidden seed. Then they shuffle both feet forward and back, forward and back: a dance before dining.

A Downy Woodpecker has also visited the redbud today, climbing the vertical trunk with her special arrangement of toes: two forward and two back. She clings easily upside down on the branches. Her white underside and white back contrast with her black and white barred wings and black tail. She is not in the tree seeking her usual fare of insects. Today she drops to the ground and scavenges for seed amongst the grass and leaves, picking up peanut and sunflower pieces. She supplements her diet of dormant insects with the season's offerings under the redbud.

With a swift and undulating flight, a White-breasted Nuthatch approaches and lands in the redbud. This is a sleek and streamlined bird with a short tail, a long sharp bill, a black cap, a white face and breast, and a beautiful rust color beneath its tail. It does not feed, but flies off to another perch several yards away. As the sun lowers in the sky and dusk descends, the birds thin out and retreat to their winter roosts, satisfied for the night.

Nature Center Happenings

CLOSED:

Thursday, January 1 and
Monday, January 19
Happy Holidays



OXLEY / REDBUD HOURS:

The gates at Oxley Nature Center are open daily, with the exception of most City holidays, from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. At Oxley, you may park outside the gates from 7:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. to walk the trails even when the gates are closed.

At Redbud Valley Nature Preserve, the gates are open Wednesdays through Sundays, from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. You may not hop the fence when the Nature Preserve is closed: on Mondays or Tuesdays, on City holidays, before 8:00 a.m. or after 5:00 p.m.

PROGRAM INFORMATION:

Call: 669-6644 to register or for more information about programs. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult, unless otherwise stated. Programs that are wheelchair accessible are designated with the ■ symbol.

Visit our website at "<http://www.oxleynaturecenter.org>"

Kid's Saturday Programs:

■\$ for general public, ■\$3 for members, all ■

Discovery Club (Ages 3-5 years)

Each child accompanied by an adult, please

January 17, 10:00-11:30 "Make a Mobile"

We will comb the forest and prairie for biofacts to make a mobile.

Sign-up begins Sunday, January 4.

February 21, 10:00-11:30 "Forest Potpourri"

Join us as we create a beautiful mixture of textures, colors and smells from the forest.

Sign-up begins February 8.

Adventure Club (Grades K-2nd)

Kids only, please

January 17, 10:00-11:30 "Scavenger Hunt"

We will hunt high and low to find the mysterious items on our list.

Sign-up begins January 4.

February 21, 10:00-11:30 "Hiking with a Walking Stick"

We will make our own walking stick and take a hike.

Sign-up begins February 8.

"Saturn At Its Best"

Saturday, January 24,
6:00-7:30 p.m.

The rings are at their maximum tilt toward Earth, allowing us a good view. Venus and the crescent moon should also be fine viewing tonight. Bring something to sit upon, and binoculars if you like. Meet at Lake Yahola. Sign-up begins January 11.

Star Programs

■\$2 to general public
free to members

All ages welcome

■ with advance
notice

"Bright Planets"

Wednesday, February 11,
6:30-8:00 p.m.

We've been watching Mars dwindle and fade since September, but it's still visible. This month we add a view of Jupiter to the evening's agenda. Saturn and Venus will also be targets for our telescope. Bring something to sit upon, and binoculars. Meet at Terrace Park. Sign-up begins February 1.

Programs, and Special Events

January

3 "Saturday Morning Birding" Ages: All ■
Saturday 8:00-9:45 p.m.
Free registration not required



Meet in the Oxley parking lot promptly at 8:00 a.m.
Bring binoculars if you have them.

11 "Geocaching for Beginners" Ages: 12 & up ■

Sunday 1:30-4:30 p.m.
\$30 for general public \$25 for members



Did you get a new GPS receiver, or are you thinking of getting one? Do your New Year's resolutions include learning a fun new hobby where you can hike and explore and meet interesting people? Oxley is a good place to learn this modern treasure hunt game. All equipment will be provided, including loaner GPS receivers. Meet at Oxley.
Sign-up begins December 28.

18 "Nature Bingo" Ages: All ■
Sunday 2:00-3:00 p.m.
\$3 for general public \$1 for members

Bingo! Was it the vulture or the channel catfish that helped you bingo? Join us on a cold January day to learn about nature. Meet at Oxley.
Sign-up begins January 4.

24 "Naturalist's Closet" Ages: All ■
Saturday 1:00-2:00 p.m.
\$2 for general public free for members

Come find out what naturalists keep in their closets. Will it be skins, skulls or mysterious insects? Maybe all these things and more! Meet at Oxley.
Sign-up begins January 11.

31 "Winter's Rainbow" Ages: All ■
Saturday 1:30-2:30 p.m.
\$2 for general public free for members

Think winter is only drab gray and dull brown? Wrong. There's a rainbow of color out there, and we're going to find it. Bundle up and come see. Meet at Oxley.
Sign-up begins January 18.

February

7 "Saturday Morning Birding" Ages: All ■
Saturday 8:00-9:45 p.m.
Free registration not required



Meet at the Oxley parking lot promptly at 8:00 a.m.
Bring binoculars if you have them.

8 "Knots & Rope Work" Ages: 10 & up ■
Sunday 2:00-3:00 p.m.
\$2 for general public free for members



Knots have been around for thousands of years—even Neolithic humans tied the reef knot, clove hitch and running noose. There are several thousands of knots in existence. We will learn a few knots that are fun and are useful around the house. Meet at Oxley.
Sign-up begins January 25.

15 "Winter Twigs" Ages: 6 & up ■
Sunday 2:00-3:30 p.m.
\$2 for general public free for members

How much did that tree grow this year? And last year? Come learn the stories winter twigs have to tell. Meet at Oxley. Sign-up begins February 1.

28 "Scavenger Hunt" Ages: All ■
Saturday 1:00-2:00 p.m.
\$2 for general public free for members

Let's see if we can find the items on our scavenger hunt list. Come help us search. Meet at Oxley.
Sign-up begins February 15.

NIGHT WALKS

Winter nights are perfect for using our sense of hearing to explore the forests and fields of Oxley. With the leaves off the trees and owls nesting this time of year we may hear these elusive birds.

☆ Tuesday, February 3, 6:30-7:30 p.m.
Families and individuals only, please.
Sign-up begins January 18.

☆ Tuesday February 17, 6:30-8:00 p.m.
For groups of six or more.
Sign-up begins January 2.

Program Fee: \$2, free to members

Full Moon Walks

We are always looking for new programs to offer a variety of experiences. A new series being offered this year are walks with family and friends under a full moon.

Once each month we will walk the fields, woods, and shorelines of the Nature Center, or perhaps a similar area, on or near the night of the full moon. The natural world can be enchanting when you experience it by moonlight. We'll also learn some of the folklore associated with the full moon.

We begin on Tuesday night, January 6th at 6:30-8:00 p.m. with the wolf moon. Friday, February 6th, again at 6:30-8:00 p.m., a snow moon will light our way.

As always, call the Nature Center to register. Fees are \$2 per person for the general public or free to members of our Friends organization.

Project Learning Tree

Date: January 17, 2004

Time: 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Cost: \$10

Place: Redbud Valley

Project Learning tree is an award-winning environmental program designed for teachers and other educators working with students in kindergarten through grade 12. It uses the forest as a "window" into the natural world, helping young people gain an awareness and knowledge of the world around them as well as their place within it. This is an indoor/outdoor workshop. Wear comfortable clothes and bring a sack lunch. Call 669-6644 to sign up.

The U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex or handicap in its federally-assisted programs and activities. If anyone believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with our department or the Office for Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.
